

THE DAIMYO'S BOWL

BY DONALD CORLEY

HIRO-TANI the Potter sat in the door of his shop and pondered as he gazed at the evening sea that lay over the lost city of Thoë. The sun had spilled upon the sea a glaze that swam and splashed and changed with the evening wind. How wonderful it would be to dip a new-made platter into it and catch the glaze! Hiro-tani thought—the glaze that was the sunset of the city of Thoë. . . . The sun went out like a stifled coal and the glaze faded into the quiet water.

This was the burden of Hiro-tani the Potter.

Two days before, a horseman had halted at the door of his shop, bearing a Wish-command from the daimyo whose pleasure-garden lay along the slope of a near-by hill like an embroidered silken fabric upon a woman's shoulder.

TO THE POTTERS OF THE PROVINCE OF SALAN

Make for me a bowl like the moon,
That I may drink rice wine from it.
A green bowl as clear as spring water
And as thin as incense smoke.
A green bowl shaped
As a young woman's breast. . . .
A bowl so strong
That boiling tea will not crack it.
So green as to be the moon
In a darkened room. . . .
So thin that the wind will sing in it
When it is empty. . . .

And to some potters had been granted fourteen days, to some nine, and to some five days, according to their skill, but to Hiro-tani the Potter only three days were given, ending with the coming of the Second Moon of spring.

Of the lesser potters a few had fled the province; some had tried, failed, and

were executed, and their heads impaled over the daimyo's gate. Others had been judged of no consequence.

When the moon hangs like a lantern
Above the Hills of the Haunters . . .
Set the bowl afloat upon the little stream
Beyond my garden wall . . .
That it may come to me in my tea-house
Lighted by the moon. . . .

So ended the daimyo's Wish-command to Hiro-tani the Potter. It was whispered by the horseman that the daimyo wished such a bowl against the maturation of the spring rice wine, which he tasted first, as lord of the province, each year.

The daimyo was all-powerful; if the bowl were not ready for the risen moon, Hiro-tani well knew that his own head would frighten evil spirits from the gate of the daimyo's garden, impaled upon a bamboo pole, and he was the last potter of Salan but the First Potter of the Empire.

Now Hiro-tani the Potter, albeit the son of a Samurai, had been born with the flame-stain of fear upon his shoulder, and for this reason the Samurai, his father, had not scrupled to disfavor him, until by some act he should prove the blood that was in him. And for this he had become a potter, wandering in distant lands, seeking the test of his courage.

And for this he went often by day (though never by night) into the Hills of the Haunters, where none dared, to a secret place that he had found, where fine porcelain-clay oozed from a crevice of the rocks, for the love of his clay-craft was strongest in him; and it was for this that he dwelt upon the sea-edge of the lost city of Thoë, which he had chosen to

be his death-journey when the arid summer of his life should wane. But the fear of death was very strong in him, by reason of his birth-stain.

Since noon the bowl that he had made for the daimyo's wine had been firing in his kiln—a bowl made of the Haunters' clay.

He rubbed his chin meditatively and a little bell tinkled behind him. Some one plucked at his drooping sleeve. It was Han-Mow, his cat, come out of the darkness of the shop to remind him of the approach of evening.

Absently he caressed Han-Mow, his cat, and as darkness fell like a cloak upon the sea, he saw the green gleam of Han-Mow's eyes.

"Your eyes would make my glaze, Han-Mow," he said, aloud.

And Han-Mow, his cat, was frightened, and retreated into the shop.

Hiro-tani followed him, lighting a candle-end at his lantern-stand. As he held it up he saw a shadow on the window curtain—a shadow of a man holding a cup in his two hands, a cup from which he drank.

Now Hiro-tani the Potter was a fearful man. He began to prostrate himself, but he recognized the shadow of his apprentice, Tama-tama, whom he had thought absent in the town.

"What is it that you are drinking, Tama-tama, in the dusk like a thief?" he asked, sternly, from his knees, being still in a dread of the shadow.

Tama-tama let fall the cup that he had drunk, and it was broken in many pieces.

"O Master Hiro-tani," he began, "it

was your rose-glaze that I drank; it is sweet to the taste; it brings me strange visions."

"And who are you that you drink my costly glazes, Tama-tama?" said Hiro-tani, sadly. "Have I not rescued thee from being a coolie, and given thee rice, and a bed of straw, and employment?"

"All these things are true, master," replied Tama-tama,

"but the rose-glaze that I drank is like no rice wine. I could not help drinking of it."

"Who told you that rose-glaze was sweet to the taste?" inquired Hiro-tani the Potter, contemplatively, being a man ever interested in curious things. His anger had melted; he had heard his own master in a distant land say that evil spirits oftentimes drank up the glazes left standing at night in jars and bowls, and that sometimes new vessels became possessed of fox-souls, and Haunters, and djinn, in search of peace.

"One night I came upon Han-Mow, thy illustrious cat, drinking from a bowl," replied Tama-tama, "and after he had drunken he went and walked, as no cat walks, around the little lake in your garden, and his eyes were like two candles burning in a cavern. And I thought that if Han-Mow, your cat, drank the glaze, it must be sweet to the taste, and I drank of it, too, and beheld such shapes in the night as I never saw when there was mist on the sea."

"This is a curious thing," reflected Hiro-tani; but aloud he said: "Go, Tama-tama, my apprentice, and henceforth drink no more of my glaze that is made of peach blossoms and budding



THE DAIMYO WAS ALL-POWERFUL

roses; likewise keep thou the covers upon the glaze-pots, lest Han-Mow, my cat, offend further."

Tama-tama went, with the visions of his glaze-drinking in his eyes, and Hiro-tani, his master, first locking Han-Mow, his cat, away in a closet, took up the jar of rose-glaze that he had made that day, poured some of it into a cup and furtively drank it.

For Hiro-tani the Potter, being a thoughtful, inquisitive man, and a diligent potter, reflected that a glaze drunk by a cat who walked about the lake in the garden as no cat walks, and by an apprentice who beheld

strange things in the night, might be worth tasting.

The rose-glaze was sweet, just as Tama-tama had said; he held it upon his tongue half fearfully; it was still warm in the cup; it was stranger than any wine . . . and the image of the woman whom he had loved in a distant land came vividly to him—a woman like a little almond-tree, who had eyes like green marsh-fire. She had died while Hiro-tani the Potter had been an apprentice himself, before he could marry her; had died leaving to him only a thread of her hair about a morsel of potter's clay for a death-gift, and a death-letter upon rice paper wound about it, a letter that he had read, and then burned in his kiln.

He had sown the ashes to the sea-roofs of the lost city of Thoë, for it is not wise to keep the writings of the dead about one.

But the death-gift he had kept because it had a thread of Y-sa-nami's, his love's, hair tied about it.

As he drank his rose-glaze the characters of the death-letter burned before his eyes:

Lest Hiro-tani the Potter
Shall need a bit of clay,
This almond-earth from my garden
Tied with a thread of my hair.

When Hiro-tani, my lover,
Shall leave his fear of death
Like a sandal at the door
His little almond-flower tree
Will blossom in his heart.



HAN-MOW, THE ILLUSTRIOUS CAT

And this was the living grief of Hiro-tani the Potter, that he kept hidden in a cranny of his heart; the piece of clay he kept in an ivory box, hidden away beneath a tile of the floor.

He drank again and again of the rose-glaze . . .

and the ghost-self of Y-sa-nami, his love, came and stood upon a disk of moonlight on the floor, moonlight that came through the round keyhole of the door, and Y-sa-nami herself smiled at him and bowed her head three times; and when she was gone a petal of the almond-flower was where she had been, upon the disk of moonlight that lay upon the floor.

Hiro-tani the Potter drew a deep breath and looked about him. He felt again the fire that was of a lover, likewise of a potter. Certainly this glaze was a wondrous and pleasant thing, perhaps a wise thing, but not a thing for cats and potters' apprentices to drink! But in his kiln he found a bowl cracked and blackened, and a despair took hold on him and a dread of the Haunters possessed him.

He came to the window that was upon the quiet sea, and slid the shutter, and looked upon the green moon that dripped and floated and flashed upon the dark mirror of the sea, and he poured more rose-glaze and drank it, and dreamed of the city of Thoë. But his

diligence dragged his thoughts back to the daimyo's bowl that he must make on the morrow, or else he die.

And a faint cry came from the closet where Han-Mow was put away.

Hiro-tani mused and dreamed in his window; the making of the bowl seemed not so troublous a thing now; he counted the curved crescents of moon that inter-laced upon the sea water.

"If I take a flat bowl," he murmured to himself, "and dip it gently into the sea, I shall have a green glaze for my bowl and roof crescents of Thoë for handles."

His eyes wandered along the curving shore and rested on something green shining there, far brighter than the moon—a pebble, he thought.

Hiro-tani kept his eyes fixed upon it, fearful lest it disappear; he leaped from his window and ran down the sloping shore to the edge of the water; eagerly he snatched up the small, green, shining thing, ran back to his shop with it, shut himself in, and lighted all the lanterns that he had.

Then he opened his closed hand to see what it was that could shine brighter than the moon. It was shining still, wet with the sea water; it was like a coal of green fire in the yellow lantern-light.

It was a little carved god of jade, wound about with green weeds.

And as Hiro-tani looked at it, his eye glistened, and he knew it for a wine-god of Thoë, from the purple mark set on the lips. He knew what he should do.

"Tama-tama, my servant, thou hast opened my eyes," he cried, aloud, and the faint cry of Han-Mow, his cat, answered him.

"But thine own eyes were opened by Han-Mow, my illustrious cat," he resumed, and he loosened the door of the closet where Han-Mow was, and drew him forth and caressed

him; presently he set for him on the floor a bowl of rose-glaze to drink.

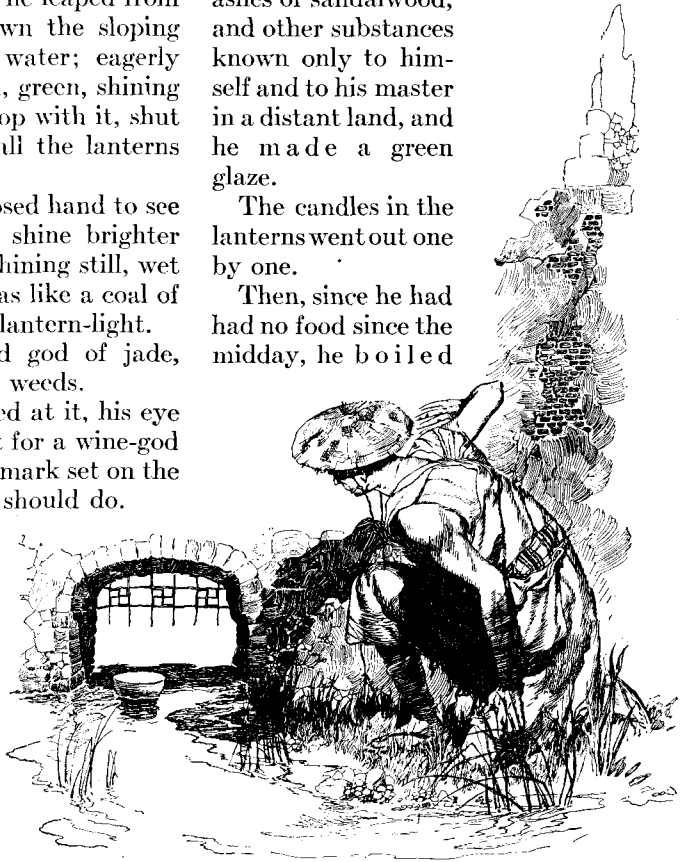
Then, for a fever was upon him, he brought a flat stone with a hollow in it, and a round hammer of bronze, and began to pound the little carved green god, and to break the pieces into other pieces, and yet into smaller pieces, and thus to a fine green powder, finer than sea sand, or rice flour, or ashes of daffodils.

The green stone was very hard, and the hammer was worn and warm to the touch when the powder was made, while Han-Mow, his cat, sat upon his folded fore legs and gazed green-eyed until the work was finished.

Then Hiro-tani lighted charcoal in his crucible, and poured the green powder into it, with wine and precious oil, and ashes of sandalwood, and other substances known only to himself and to his master in a distant land, and he made a green glaze.

The candles in the lanterns went out one by one.

Then, since he had had no food since the midday, he boiled



HE WATCHED IT DISAPPEAR THROUGH THE SMALL GRATING IN THE WALL

rice and ate of it, extinguished the crucible fire with sand, covered the glaze with an old bronze dish, and stretched himself upon the floor with Han-Mow, his cat, in his left sleeve, as the windows were lighted by the dawn.

Hiro-tani the Potter was awakened by a clatter upon the tiled floor. Being still in the daze of little sleep, he rubbed his eyes and beheld Tama-tama, his servant, upon his face, the bronze dish upon the floor, and golden limes scattered about the shop.

"Thou art always letting something fall, Tama-tama," he said, sitting up. His eyes rested upon the crucible, which was empty.

"I came upon you sleeping, O master," said Tama-tama, rubbing his nose

upon the floor, "and took the dish from the crucible to gather golden limes, thinking to please you, and when I returned I found Han-Mow, your illustrious cat, with his fore feet upon the crucible. And he had licked the last drop of the glaze from it. And his eyes were like two green jewels. He jumped through the window, and I was frightened and let fall the dish of golden limes."

"Go, Tama-tama, my servant!" Hiro-tani whispered. "Soil not the floor of my shop again with thy feet. Thou knowest not what thou hast done. But first find Han-Mow, my cat, and bring him to me."

And he bowed his head upon his knees and remained sitting until Tama-tama came with Han-Mow, the cat, bound in



AT THE DOOR WERE TWO SERVANTS OF THE DAIMYO, WITH DRAWN SWORDS



ONE OF THE SERVANTS STRUCK HIRO-TANI TO HIS KNEES

a piece of yellow silk and crying softly. Silently Tama-tama laid him at his master's feet, and sorrowfully he went away.

For a long time Hiro-tani sat bowed, then he took up Han-Mow, his cat, gently, and unbound the yellow silk from him, and looked into his burning green eyes.

But he said nothing, for the eyes were like those of Y-sa-nami whom he had loved in a distant land. . . .

For a long time he looked, and again a fever was upon him.

With his two thumbs he quickly pressed the two eyes of Han-Mow, his cat, and they fell into the crucible, and again he poured into it wine and precious oil and ashes of sandalwood and other substances known only to himself and to his master in a distant land. And he lighted charcoal and sat brooding before his crucible.

Han-Mow, his cat, ran thrice around

the shop, crying in the agony of his blindness, and fled down the sloping shore and into the sea.

It was now noon.

And as Hiro-tani the Potter brooded over his crucible, and beheld the two eyes of Han-Mow, his cat, whom he loved, a tear fell from his eye into the crucible, and was mingled with the wine and the precious oil and the ashes of sandalwood and the eyes of Han-Mow, which presently became a green glaze, as clear as spring water.

Feverishly the potter toiled; he made a fire-mask for the daimyo's bowl; he lifted the tile from the floor and drew forth the ivory box, and he took the clay tied with the thread of Y-sa-nami's hair, that she had left him for a death-gift, and mingled with it the distilled perfume of the almond-flower, until it was soft, and upon his wheel he quickly turned, in the shape of a young woman's breast, the bowl itself . . . and again the

death-letter of Y-sa-nami swam before his eyes. The bowl was thinner than smoke, and so fragile that he took the wheel into the sun that was setting, turning it swiftly to keep the bowl from falling, until the sun had dried it a little.

Then he dipped the bowl into his green glaze and laid it tenderly in the fire-mask, and set it in the kiln. And darkness fell, with only the faint rose light of the kiln in the shop; the moon rose, and Hiro-tani the Potter drew forth the bowl, and it was finished. The first night wind cooled it in the open window.

It was a vessel as transparent as green spring water, thinner than incense

smoke, green as the moon is green, and shaped as moonlight upon a young woman's breast. The night wind sang in it song-legends of the city of Thoë.

And in the bottom of the green wraith-cup was a crystal bubble, as clear as morning rain water.

And this was the tear of Hiro-tani the Potter.

With the bowl in his hands, shrouded in an ell of gift silk, Hiro-tani sped along the highway by the sea and up the hill to where the daimyo's garden lay like an embroidered fabric upon a woman's shoulder.

And in the murmur of the sea and in



THE WOMAN OF THE YELLOW SPRING LOOKED AT HIM

the cries of the marsh-birds and in the whisper of the trees he heard only the cry of Han-Mow, his cat.

In a little wood he found the stream that watered the daimyo's garden, and set the bowl afloat with the tiny petal of the almond-flower, that the ghost-self of Y-sa-nami had left him, in it.

He followed the bowl as it floated gently down the stream, striking small stones now and then, and giving forth a sound that was like the bell of Han-Mow, his cat. And as the bowl came out of the little cypress wood into the light of the Second Moon of spring he saw that the thread of Y-sa-nami's hair had woven itself into the side of it, but it was a character that he could not read.

It was like a reflection of the moon; it was like a lantern buried in deep water; it was like a tear from the eye of the moon.

Hiro-tani followed it until he came to the wall of the daimyo's garden, and from his knees he watched it disappear through the small grating in the wall, left open by the daimyo's command.

He waited a little. He listened. . . .

A cry pierced the stillness as a sword severs a curtain of silk; a cry of admiration, of surprise, of awe—the tribute that comes occasionally to an artist, and once, perhaps, reflected Hiro-tani, to a potter.

And he stole sorrowfully away to the sea, and along the empty highway by the lost city of Thoë, to his twice empty shop, to drink rose-glaze.

He was awakened out of stupor by a knocking. At the door were two servants of the daimyo, with drawn swords.

In silence they led him along the sea and up the hill to the gate of the daimyo's garden.

"Was not the bowl as your master wished?" stammered Hiro-tani. But they answered nothing.

In his tea-house the daimyo sat, and with him his magician, of another country. Three dancing-women crouched on cushions mutely.

The daimyo frowned when Hiro-tani stood before him, and his magician

struck the bowl with his long finger-nail. The bowl gave forth a cry, and it was the cry of Han-Mow, the cat.

"There is a Haunter in the bowl, my master," said the magician.

"There are troubled images in it; there is a riddle in the bowl," said the daimyo, who made a sign to the two servants, who struck Hiro-tani to his knees, and one of them raised his two-handed sword.

"If the bowl be broken," said the magician, "the Haunter will return to the hills and no harm come to this house."

"The bowl is too beautiful to be broken," replied the daimyo, who was a fearless man. "This potter is the Haunter."

But as the sword hissed through the air the daimyo lifted a finger, the executioner swerved the blade, and it was splintered on the stone floor of the tea-house.

"It is an evil to attempt to kill a Haunter," resumed the daimyo.

"There is said to be a woman in the hills who can read riddles and cast out Haunters," hazarded the magician.

"What of her?" asked the daimyo.

"She is called the Woman of the Yellow Spring—the spring that once watered the streets of the city of Thoë," explained the magician, quaking.

"Go thou and fetch the woman," said the daimyo, sternly.

"Would it not be well to send this potter?" the magician argued, at his master's shoulder. "If he be a Haunter we shall have rid this honorable house of him peaceably. If he be only a potter he will be lost in the Hills of the Haunters and never seen again."

The daimyo reflected.

"Blindfold the potter's eyes and let him seek the Woman of the Spring," he said, finally. "If he be possessed, he can venture into the hills blindfolded, and if he is taken, it is of no consequence."

The magician drew a breath of relief.

And the two servants of the daimyo tied cloth about Hiro-tani's eyes, and led

him to the gate of the garden, the magician following.

"How shall I find the Woman of the Yellow Spring?" asked Hiro-tani, as they pushed him through the gate.

"Go up the hill beyond the garden wall," whispered the magician; "follow the stream past seven water-clefts eastways and two windways, and in the roots of a ruined cypress seek a door of ebon wood with a tortoise-shell upon it. Scratch with your finger-nails upon the tortoise-shell, and the Woman will open to you."

And when the potter's steps had ceased to crunch the moon-frozen grass beyond the gate, the servants tied the gate with ropes of black silk, lighted torches of cypress-oil; four fighting-men in dragon-masks of red lacquer beat with swords of bronze unceasingly the gilded wooden eave-bells of the tea-house, hung there to frighten Things, while the daimyo sat reflective, staring at his bowl, and the magician irritably plucked his beard.

Hiro-tani the Potter stumbled and fell and ran, and crept and felt his way through the hills, past seven water-clefts (which he knew by the sound of them) eastways, and two windways, and found a spring that issued from a hollow in the roots of a cypress-tree in the rocks, for he dared not take off his blindfold lest he should see fearsome Things. There was a polished door of ebon wood in the elbow of the rock, with a tortoise-shell nailed upon it. He scratched with his nails upon the tortoise-shell, which made a noise like owls.

"Who calls me?" asked a gentle voice, and the voice was like an echo of Y-sa-nami whom he loved in a distant land.

"Hiro-tani the Potter," he answered, trembling.

The door was opened, and he felt a light through his blindfold. The Woman of the Yellow Spring looked long at him and said, softly, "Why does Hiro-tani the Master Potter come to the Yellow Spring with a bandage upon his eyes?"

"O Woman of the Spring," said Hiro-

tani, "the daimyo of Salan sent me to beg thee to cast out the Haunter from a bowl which I had the misfortune to make for him. If thou canst not cast it out I shall die, and the bowl be buried with me; the bowl is too precious to be buried."

"I will come," said the witch, and her voice was a ghost-memory to Hiro-tani the Potter.

She took him by the sleeve and led him past the water-clefts by turnings of her own, and down the stony hill to the gate of the daimyo's garden.

The Second Moon of spring had bur-nished the Hills of the Haunters; the gilded bells of wood were silenced, the silken ropes sword-severed, as the Woman of the Spring whispered softly at the cranny of the daimyo's garden gate.

The daimyo still sat in his carved chair, contemplating his bowl, but he had not drunk the rice wine that was in it.

It was now first cock-crow.

The Woman came into the tea-house, leading Hiro-tani by his sleeve. At the sight of her, shrouded in a single square of yellow silk, one of the dancing-women screamed and buried her face in cushions.

The Woman took the bowl from its slender stand of teak and looked long into it.

No word was spoken, but the magician coughed.

"There are eyes in the bowl," she said, finally—"the eyes of a god. . . . There is the hair of a woman's head, wrought to be read. . . . There is a secret to be told. . . . A promise is here. . . . There is fear in the bowl. . . . It is a crossing star of life and death. . . . Dead things of the sea and tender things of the moon. . . . Resolve awaits understanding. . . . Faith leads beauty. . . . I can read no more. Who looks into the bowl will find his answer."

"Remove the blindfold," commanded the daimyo.

And Hiro-tani looked into the bowl that he had made, and he *saw* the mirrored eyes of Y-sa-nami whom he loved

in a distant land, but he *said*: "O Han-Mow, my beloved cat, thou didst drink my glaze of jade, and thy green eyes I wrought into this bowl therefor, lest I die, and because of my love for thee a tear from my eye fell into the glaze and I used the death-gift of Y-sa-nami, my love, because of my fear.

"*I have no fear!*"

And he threw the bowl from him, and it was broken upon the great bronze gong that hung like a winter sun at the right hand of the daimyo. The gong shivered into clangor that shook the tea-house, and the sound of it eddied and tingled into music that was like laughter and crying together, and the Woman of the Spring came out of her veil of yellow silk (that was like a pool upon the floor) and fell upon the neck of Hiro-tani the Potter. She was a young woman like a little almond-tree, with eyes like green marsh-fire, and he looked well upon her, and saw that she *was* indeed Y-sa-nami, his love, come again to him.

And Y-sa-nami, his love, fell at the feet of the daimyo, crying: "This is my lover of a distant land, born with the flame-stain of fear. My death-wish in leaving him was for my bloom-return

in his heart. I became the Woman of the Spring that sea-waters the jade-paved streets of Thoë, but for his fear of death I could not come to him. The breaking of the bowl was the ghost-battle of a wine-god intermingled with a fear, and battle-sung with a cloisonné hair of that Y-sa-nami's head that he loved. His tear of sweet tenderness has exalted my lord's cup! I beseech thy august pardon for him, lord; his blood is Samurai, even as thy own.

"The fear of Hiro-tani was left like a sandal at your door."

"Thou *art* a fearless man, to break a bowl of mine," the daimyo said, and lifted up Y-sa-nami from the floor.

By virtue of his rank he wedded them with two rings of jade from his thumb, while the magician, searching in a corner, found a glittering jewel like a spark of white moonfire. And this he slipped into his master's hand as these two went out of the tea-house into the sea-morning, and down the hill to the potter's house at the edge of the city of Thoë, escorted by servants with two-handed swords.

And the sound of a little tinkling bell, as of Han-Mow, their cat, followed them.